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PART I

THE PEOPLE—THEIR COUNTRY AND DIET

CHAPTER I

THE BEMBA PEOPLE AND THEIR COUNTRY

Origin.

THE Bemba are the largest and most highly organized tribe in North-Eastern Rhodesia.[1] They are a warrior people of Congo origin which apparently invaded their present territory at the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century. Moving eastwards from the banks of the Kasai, they eventually reached the great Luapula river which forms the western boundary of this part of Northern Rhodesia. They passed north of the Bangweolu swamps, according to most traditions, travelled up the Chambesi in a north-easterly direction, and finally established their Paramount chief, the Citimukulu, in the centre of this Tanganyika plateau not far from the present Government station of Kasama. From this point they gradually expanded, pushing back earlier immigrants of the same origin, such as the Bisa, either in a west and south-westerly direction into the swamps of Lake Bangweolu, or eastwards to the borders of the Luangwa valley. They also drove wedges into the territory of the Lungu, Itabwa, and Mambwe to the north. Hence numbers of scattered tribelets came to acknowledge the rule of the Citimukulu and paid him tribute, and groups of his chosen followers were settled in the outlying districts to exact these dues. His power seems to have been still further consolidated by the arrival of Arab traders in the middle of the nineteenth century, since they brought him guns, of which he kept complete possession, in return for ivory and slaves. In fact before the coming of the white man at the end of the century it seems that the Citimukulu held sway over the whole of the district between the four great lakes, Tanganyika, Nyasa, Bangweolu, and Mweru, and south into the present Lala and Lamba country. With the

[1] J. Moffat Thomson gives the following figures for the biggest tribes of NE. Rhodesia: Bemba 114,274, Cewa 78,400, Ngoni 53,991, and none of the other tribal groups number more than 30,000. N. Rhodesian Government 'Memorandum on the native tribes and tribal areas of N. Rhodesia', 1934.

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174 establishment of the British South Africa Company at Kasama in 1899 the military conquests of the Bemba suddenly ceased. The Citimukulus of to-day rule over their own territory only. It stretches from 29° west to 32·5° east and from 9° north to 12° south, and covers the whole of the administrative district of Kasama and most of those of Mpika, Chinsali, and Luwingu, an area rather larger than that of Ireland. It includes much of the Bisa and Lungu territory occupied during the last century and now predominantly inhabited by them, and the Bemba are still regarded as the dominant tribe in the district by members of other groups.

101 173 According to their own traditions, and those of the surrounding peoples, the Bemba were originally an offshoot of the great Luba tribe which inhabited the Katanga area of the Congo east of the Kasai river, and their invasion of their present territory seems to have been one of a series of immigrations of which the Bisa were apparently the first to arrive, the Bemba the second, and the Lunda, now inhabiting the region round Lake Mweru, the third.[1] The swamp-dwelling peoples of the Bangweolu district—the Ushi, Unga, Bena Ngumbo, Bena Cishinga, &c.—have also a tradition of Congo origin, as have the Lala and Lamba peoples to the south, and the Kaonde in North-Western Rhodesia, to mention only a number of the bigger tribes. Whatever the date and order of their arrival it is sufficient for our present purposes to state that all these tribes have certain features in common. The languages they speak are 101 sufficiently alike for them to be grouped for administrative purposes as 'Cibemba-speaking people'.[2] They are all predominantly agricultural as are the kindred peoples in the Congo.[3] Descent,

[1] J. C. C. Coxhead notes that Lacerda visited the Lunda kings in the region in 1798, and deduces that this tribe arrived some sixty years earlier, i.e. in 1740, and the Bemba a generation or two earlier still. *The Native Tribes of N.E. Rhodesia; their laws and customs*, R.A.I. Occasional Papers No. 5, p. 3. Verhulpen considers that 'Babemba' was the name given to the Lunda people when they had crossed the Luapula into their present territory. Op. cit., p. 391. The Bemba themselves are emphatic that they arrived with the Lunda and parted with them just south of Lake Mweru.

[2] Cf. tribal map at the end of the book. Members of all these tribes are described as 'Bemba' by compound managers on the N.R. copper belt.

[3] A few cattle and sheep are kept by the tribes in the Bangweolu swamps, such as the Ushi, Bisa, &c., by the Cewa on the Nyasaland border (A. Hodgson, *J.R.A.I.*, 1933, p. 152) and the Lunda in N.W. Rhodesia (Smith and Dale, op. cit., vol. i, p. 131), and a certain number of the Kasai tribes give a marriage payment in sheep and goats, such as the Songe (Van Overbergh, *Les Basonge*, 1908, p. 215), and Luba (Verhulpen, op. cit., p. 262), or even in cattle among the

101 considered here but will be discussed in a forthcoming section concerned
131 with the peoples of the eastern shore of southern Lake Tanganyika and adjacent regions.

In brief, the Bemba-Lala-Lamba-Kaonde groups, with their closely related sub-groups, occupy almost the whole of North-eastern Rhodesia and the northern parts of North-western Rhodesia, besides adjacent areas of the Belgian Congo.

132 With the exception of the swamp-dwelling groups, the Unga and the Twa,
133 all live under broadly similar conditions. Plentiful rainfall waters the generally unproductive plateau soils covered by deciduous woodland. The
161 density of population which such land can carry is small, reaching only to about 12 persons per square mile, and this figure is not exceeded, or even approached, except in reserves where local over-population of a serious nature occurs, and in the swamp areas where inundation creates a land shortage either permanent or seasonal. The total population of the selected groups can be reckoned to be about 440,000.

GENERAL CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

197 The languages of these peoples are closely similar, so much so that the whole group of peoples in this area has been loosely termed "Bemba-speaking".(1) Guthrie, however, distinguishes within one of his linguistic zones *Bemba* with *Aushi* as a sub-dialect; *Tabwa* with *Shila* as a sub-dialect; and a further group of closely related languages, *Bisa*, *Lamba*, *Lala*, *Swaka*, and *Sewa*.(2) He places *Kaonde* in a different linguistic zone, L, because it has certain distinct features, such as a single prefix in independent nominals, which make it more closely related to the Luba group of languages. No mention is made of the languages spoken by other small groups closely related to the Bemba, such as Chishinga, Mukulu, Ngumbu, Kawendi, and Bwile. What little is known about the languages spoken by the Unga and Twa suggests that they may be closely related to Bisa.

174 There is apparently little linguistic evidence to support the tradi-
173 tion held by all these peoples that they originated in areas west of the Luapula from peoples of Luba stock, although Richards says that Bemba told her that archaic words they used in ceremonies at their Paramount's court were "Ciluba".

105 These people practise shifting cultivation with finger millet as the staple crop in the east and cassava in the west. The absence of cattle in the area distinguishes them from the Mambwe to the north and some of the Ngoni to the east. The greater part of the area lies within the tsetse belt, but Lambo mentions that cattle were used as marriage payments among the Lala, and a few goats and sheep are kept by the Bemba and probably by other tribes. Hunting was highly developed in the west of the area before the arrival of Europeans and hunting guilds and associations are recorded.

(1) Richards, 6, 1939, p. 16, and Moffat Thomson, 1934.
(2) Guthrie, 1948. A zone is both a geographical and a linguistic concept in that the languages within it have both linguistic affinities and geographical propinquity.

4: Whiteley E-4 (no date) 1950 FQ5 Bemba FQ5
Senga

VI. A NOTE ON THE SENGA

(A Tumbuka-ised offshoot of the Bisa
in the upper Luangwa valley)

161 POPULATION AND DISTRIBUTION

No figures specific to the Senga are available but Moffat Thomson[1] gives a figure of 67,477 for both Senga and Nsenga, while Poole gives 44,000 for the Nsenga in 1930. This suggests a figure of 23,000 for the Senga.

A rough idea of the density of population may be found in the figures for administrative districts in 1934[2] and in 1947 (c).[2]

	1934		1947
Chinsali	3.46	per square mile	3.7
Lundazi	5.49	" " "	5.9

A number of Senga share Northern reserve no. 13 with other groups.

LANGUAGE

197 The difference between the Senga and the Nsenga is to be seen in language, although confusion has obscured the difference for some years. For instance, Madan's[3] *Senga Handbook* actually refers to the Nsenga, as does Ranger's *Chinsenga Grammar*,[4] although it is not clear from the latter's preface whether he includes the Senga and thus confuses them. Duke[5] makes no reference to Senga as distinct from Nsenga, but whether from lack of material or from the belief that there was no distinction is not clear. Guthrie,[6] however, draws a distinction. While he places both Senga and Nsenga in the same linguistic zone, Senga is considered to be a dialect of Tumbuka while Nsenga is a language in a different group, more closely related to languages spoken in Portuguese East Africa. While paucity of information on Senga precludes anything more than this tentative classification, the available evidence suggests a fairly well marked linguistic difference between the two.

HISTORY

174 Tribal traditions seem to agree that the Senga originally migrated eastwards from the Lunpula in company with the Bisa, of whom indeed they formed a part.[7] After a period spent near Lake Bangweulu, from which they were dislodged by Bemba raids, they crossed the Luangwa river about 1800, a date tentatively suggested by Poole. On their arrival here there seems to have been considerable intermarriage with the Tumbuka on the plateau to the east of the river, as a result of which some similarity to Tumbuka customs may be expected.

Bemba and Ngoni raids seem always to have been a menace, even in the

(1) Moffat Thomson, 1934.
(2) Pim, 1938, and *Report of the Financial Relationship Committee*, 1949.
(3) Madan, 1905.
(4) Ranger, 1928.
(5) Duke, 1945.
(6) Guthrie, 1948.
(7) Poole, 1934.

valley, and the substantial stockades of Senga chiefs on which Fraser[1] commented bore witness to the fear in which these raiders were held.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

As stated above the Senga inhabit the Upper Luangwa valley, at an altitude of some 3,000 ft., decreasing to the south. It is a region for which adequate climatological data are not available but the rainfall is probably less than on the Plateau with an average of 30-35" annually. The probable temperature range is from 65°F. (mean min.) to 88°F. (mean max.).

The soils generally are more fertile than those on the Plateau, especially close to the river, and are of a heavier texture and darker colour. A type of woodland (*Isoberlinia - Globiflora - Brachystegia*) common to the Plateau is found on the western banks of the Luangwa, but the valley floor and the eastern banks are covered with *Hyparr* scrub-land, in which the trees attain a fair height near the river but are stunted towards the escarpment.

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

The shifting cultivation on the sterile soils of the Plateau gives way in the valley, potentially at any rate, to semi-permanent cultivation. Maize, finger millet and Kaffir corn are the most important crops, each of which is found locally as a staple. There are various sequences, from a millet-Kaffir corn sequence in northern districts to a millet-Kaffir corn or maize-groundnut sequence in districts in contact with the mixed Tonga-Cewa groups of the Middle Luangwa and on the eastern banks towards Lundazi.

In both sequences new sites are first cleared of trees and the branches and brushwood burnt. Later, in the first sequence, the grass which grows up in the clearing is cut down and left to rot helped by the first rain; this forms the seed bed for the millet - some maize had already been scattered before the grass was cut - and little subsequent weeding is carried out. Kaffir corn may be sown in the following year or, alternatively, in the third year after a second millet crop. A few pumpkins and cucurbits are also found.

In the second sequence, after preliminary clearing, there is less tendency to use rotting grass as a seed bed, but to leave it standing to manure subsequent crops. Millet is planted with maize and in the following year Kaffir corn and maize are planted in varying proportions in a seed bed of grass-manure left from the previous year. In some areas maize may be planted alone and a simple millet-maize sequence carried on for up to ten years. On lighter soils groundnuts may be planted in the third year.

Apart from this groundnuts are normally grown in seperate gardens. Small gardens for maize in the dry season and rice cultivation are locally found, as is tobacco, particularly in Chinsali district. Village gardens are not properly found in the area but small plots of sweet potatoes, cassava, beans and pawpaw are commonly found near villages.

(1) Fraser, 1914.

167 The economic wealth of the valley makes it attractive to immigrants, increasingly numerous since the development of Katanga mining enterprises has created a ready market for the Luapula fish.

Labour Migration

A considerable and growing proportion of young men seek seasonal employment in the Copperbelt and, to a lesser extent, in the Katanga mines. It has been tentatively suggested that perhaps a quarter of the male taxable population is away at work.

HISTORY

● 174 The people at the court of the Kazembe struck Gamitto as historically-minded to an extent unparalleled in Central Africa.(1) Some of their traditions find support in those of other tribes and in the evidence of early travellers.

The pygmies, said to have been the first inhabitants, are particularly associated with Kilwa, where, according to tradition, all but two of them perished in a fire started unwittingly by Kapunto of *Bena Bumbo* (Clay clan) who had come from the Upper Luapula. The country was gradually populated by small, self-contained groups, usually segments of matrilineal clans, which, led by their *fikolwe*, wandered in, mainly from the Lake country, in pursuit of game or in quest of new land. Among the first to come were *Bena Bumbo* (Clay clan) from Watanda on the Upper Luapula, *Bena Lungu* (Calabash clan), *Bena Ntambo* (Tortoise clan), both from the Lake territories, and the now extinct *Bena Kanyungwa*. *Bena Bwitilile* ("people who eat on their own", i.e. owe no allegiance and pay no tribute), the general designation given to these groups by Nkuba's followers, is an allusion to their lack of political organisation. The first Nkuba, who had broken away from the Bemba, came to Lake Mweru apparently for ivory which was not valued by the local population.(2) He established a highly-organised kingdom which extended along the lower reaches of the Luapula (from Chibondo on the western and Lukwesa on the eastern bank) to the periphery of Lake Mweru. His people intermarried with the *Bena Bwitilile* and their descendants became the *Bashila* (literally "fishermen") of the Lunda.

Higher up the valley were the autonomous chiefdoms of the *Bena Nzoka* (Snake clan), *Bena Nsha* (Locust clan), *Bena Ngoma* (Drum clan), *Bakunda* (Frog clan), *Bashimbe* (Leopard clan) which successfully resisted Nkuba. Later arrivals from the west included the *Bena Mbeba* who came under Lubunda and the *Bena Ngozi* (Bird clan). They had organised courts and a system of tribute and they erected ntemba huts to house the relics of their dead chiefs.

175 The Lunda from the empire of Mwata Yamvo (also spelt Mutimfa, Mwata Yambo, Mwata-Hiamvo, Mwata yi Nvo)(3) on the rivers Kasai and Luiza made their appearance around 1740.(4) The expedition was prompted by the desire

(1) Voléo, 1861, II, p.262. (2) Crawford, 2, p.254.
(3) Burton, op.cit., p.81; see also *The Southern Lunda and related peoples*, H. McCulloch, 1950, I.A.I. (4) Coxhead, op.cit., p.3.

7:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1940 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

ciples of social grouping such as descent, age, sex differences, or local ties by which the tribe may be integrated and the incidence of authority determined; (*d*) the economic bases of the people's activities which affect their degree of dispersal, the form of leadership required, and the economic values associated with political prerogatives; (*e*) the type of foreign rule to which the tribe is subject and the European elements that are effecting its political development, i.e. variations in policy from the administrative system known as Indirect Rule in Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, Uganda, to the more direct government by the white man in South Africa or the attempts made to create new political institutions for Natives, such as the Bunga system of the Transkei.

All these factors will be found to account for differences in political organization among a number of the kindred peoples known as the Bantu, and I shall try to analyse the Bemba system along these lines.

II. The Bemba Tribe

(*a*) *Tribal Composition.* The Bemba tribe at present inhabits the Tanganyika plateau of north-eastern Rhodesia, between the four great lakes—Tanganyika to the north-east, Nyassa to the east, and Mweru and Bangweolu to the north-west and west respectively. They number to-day about 140,000, very sparsely scattered over the country at a density of an average 3·75 per square mile.

The Bemba trace their origin to the area now known as the Belgian Congo and declare that they were originally an offshoot from the great Luba people which inhabits the Kasai district. The fact that the first ancestor of the Bemba is known as Citi Muluba ('Citi the Luban') substantiates this tradition, together with the cultural similarities still noted between the two peoples and the fact that Luban words, no longer understood by the Bemba commoner, are still used as part of the religious ritual at the paramount chief's court. The legends of immigration are numerous and circumstantial. The first arrivals apparently crossed the Lualaba River, which forms the western boundary of their present territory, about the middle of the eighteenth century, and travelled north and east until they established their first headquarters near Kasama, the present administrative centre of the Bemba country. From the sociological point of view, their history

7:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1940 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

dates from this period, since the composition of the invading group still determines the title to chieftainships, rank, succession to various officer, and the order of precedence of a number of the older clans.

The Bemba are to all intents and purposes a homogeneous group. They form a quite distinct political unit from the Bisa, Lala, Lunda, and other neighbouring tribes with similar traditions of origin and marked cultural and linguistic affinities. The Bemba declare that their forefathers found the country empty on their arrival, and, whether this is true or not, there seems to have been no strong opposition from whatever groups occupied the territory. The war-like habits of this tribe seem to have developed later, when they spread into the surrounding districts, pushing back their neighbours, such as the Lungu to the north-west, the Bisa and the Lala to the west and south respectively, and the Cewa to the east. The dominance of the Bemba chiefs was still more effectively enforced by the import of Arab guns in the nineteenth century. Where they did not dislodge the occupants of the surrounding country, their chiefs appointed members of the royal family or specially faithful subjects to hold the district for him (*ukulashika*) and to collect tribute of ivory tusks, grain, iron-work, salt, or other goods. The empire of the Bemba extended at one time right up into the Congo and to the shores of Lake Tanganyika, and they exerted influence over most of the present Bisa and Lala country to the south. With the coming of the white man at the end of the nineteenth century, their authority over the surrounding tribes collapsed, and though Bemba chiefs still rule over Bisa villages, e.g. in the Chinsali and Luwingu districts, it is rather a case of tribal admixture on the borders than a large-scale incorporation of foreign elements such as has occurred in the history of some of the Southern Bantu states. For the purposes of the present inquiry, we can reckon the Bemba as a homogeneous tribe with a history of settled occupation of their present territory lasting about 200 years.

The distinctive marks of tribal membership are the following: (*a*) The common name *Babemba*, still uttered with a good deal of pride in such phrases as '*Fwe Babemba*' ('We, the Bemba'), used to preface bragging references to the exploits of the tribe as compared to those of surrounding peoples, who are still sometimes referred to contemptuously as slaves (*bashya*). (*b*) The common